

BANGALORE – FUTURE TRENDS IN PUBLIC OPEN SPACE USAGE
CASE STUDY: MAHATMA GANDHI ROAD, BANGALORE

UDAY VAGALE

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Landscape Architecture

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April 27, 2004.
Blacksburg, Virginia.

Keywords: Bangalore, India, Public Space.

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ABSTRACT

From 'Pensioners Paradise' or 'Garden City' to 'Silicon Valley' or 'Garbage City', the city of Bangalore has come a long way. One of the interesting aspects of life in Bangalore is 'public life' and the use of public space. However the quality of public spaces in Bangalore has deteriorated over the years due to several reasons. Rapid development, increase in traffic, encroachment into public spaces and lack of management of public spaces have all contributed to this. The CBD (Central Business District) area, especially M.G. Road has evolved as the de-facto centre of Bangalore. Hence a space that used to cater to a city of 2 million in 1980 has to now cater to a city of 5 million. This has led to congestion on M.G. Road, especially along the sidewalk, where people jostle each other to get to their destinations and one can no longer take a leisure stroll or promenade in comfort. Although the sidewalk has been historically an important public space, it is now slowly being reduced to the function of circulation.

The increase in population has also altered the demands on public spaces in Bangalore. The cosmopolitan image that Bangalore has acquired has resulted in the creation of many eclectic spaces such as pubs, open-air cafés, and food courts. The common man is being left out of this semi-public realm because of affordability, causing a social rift. Also with pressure increasing on the streets it is becoming difficult to cater to these needs in an appropriate manner. The public realm is slowly diminishing and the semi-private realm is filling the void. This calls for a re-evaluation of the role of a street and how it is functioning in Bangalore and exploration of new spatial types of public spaces, which can be introduced in the public realm. Public spaces should reconcile these differences rather than aggravate them. With pressure on land due to increasing population and density a contest for space is inevitable. What is important is to reconcile these differences and evolve a strategy through which public space can be returned to the people irrespective of religion, caste, creed, class or political alignment for the common good without compromising on aesthetics. At the same time the poor and deprived need to feel a sense of belonging and ownership in the city. Public space is one of the few mediums for such expressions and hence the duty of the city to provide it. Also the absence of iconic public spaces as landmarks has resulted in Bangalore remaining an imageless city, a former middle-class city with no apparent vernacular. Today Bangalore has no real city centre to represent its image and cater to its citizens. The elements of a city centre already exist as observed by Rao & Tewari; it is a matter of giving it structure and a sense of place.

Bangalore today confronts several problems with respect to its public spaces – lack of an imageable city centre; contest for urban and public space based on class and caste; privatisation / corporatisation of public space. To curtail violent and disruptive demonstration of ideas and aspirations by various interest groups especially those of the suppressed, the city needs a democratic, civic space in the perceived/evolving heart of the city – M.G. Road. Such a space would attempt to bridge the zoning of Bangalore and the lack of imageability of the city; providing its citizens a space to speak their minds, to protest, to celebrate, to mourn, to recreate and most importantly to unite.

The thesis document comprises three sections. The first section deals with theory pertaining to the design of public spaces that provides a basis to evaluate public spaces in Bangalore, and draw conclusions, which can be applied in the design project. It draws from public space theory pertaining to the issues identified earlier. The second section provides a brief history of urbanisation of Bangalore. It describes the use of public space from colonial times to the present and draws conclusions for future development of public spaces in Bangalore. The last section applies and tests the conclusions arrived at in the previous two chapters through a design project for a site on Mahatma Gandhi Road. The design process and final product comprises the third section.